



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBER
ROGER BERLINER

January 15, 2008

**Statement of Councilmember Roger Berliner
On BRAC Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

Under the mandate of the Defense Base and Closure and Realignment Act of 1990, as amended in 2005, Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC will close and all sub-specialty and complex care will be relocated to the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) in Bethesda. The BRAC law requires this consolidation to be completed by September 2011. The new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center will see an increase of approximately 2,500 employees while outpatient visits by patients and family members are expected to double, to nearly 900,000 per year.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released by the Navy on December 14, 2007, details the effect of this relocation and proposes limited mitigation measures to reduce these impacts. The Navy has rejected requests from myself and other Montgomery County Councilmembers to extend the 45-day comment period to the EIS, leaving County officials and members of the public with a brief time frame to read and respond to a lengthy document which contains proposed recommendations that could affect the quality of life of thousands of Bethesda residents.

Residents of the neighborhoods surrounding NNMC have devoted the past month to reviewing the EIS and have shared many of their concerns with my office. Their comments and my own review of the EIS lead me to conclude that the Navy needs to fundamentally rethink, revise, and rework its suggested mitigations to the impact of the relocation of Walter Reed to Bethesda. The overarching goal of these mitigation measures *must be* to reduce single occupancy vehicle trips to NNMC – world class medical institutions only function when patients and staff can arrive in a timely and safe manner to the campus. The families in surrounding neighborhoods must be allowed to enter and exit their homes without fear of round the clock gridlock.

The following issues require further analysis by the Navy as it prepares the final EIS:

- The federal government must assume its financial responsibility to pay for the road improvements needed to mitigate the effects of greatly increased traffic in one of the most congested areas of the County. Failure to do so creates an unfunded mandate for local and state communities already facing drastic budget

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shortfalls. The County needs to directly challenge the assertion that the Defense Access Roads (DAR) funding source is not applicable.

- Creation of mandatory Traffic Demand Management practices which discourages the use of single occupancy vehicles. The strategies discussed in the EIS are illustrative only and include no specific actions to implement the goal of reducing vehicle trips. NNMC should, for example, create a shuttle bus system to transport employees from satellite parking lots.
- A substantial reduction in the number of parking spaces provided on site. The DEIS contemplates an increase of 1,800 parking spaces, which would result in a ratio of one parking space for every 1.3 employees. This is significantly more parking than is recommended for sites immediately adjacent to a metro station and is, as the Planning Board staff has made clear, “counterproductive to achieving the goals of transportation demand management.”
- Mass transit use would increase with a second Metro entrance on the east side of MD 355. Construction of a pedestrian bridge or tunnel across MD 355 would also provide safe passage across a road most pedestrians find harrowing to traverse.
- Bicycle and pedestrian access to NNMC must be a priority. Sidewalks should be widened and bicycle access to the campus must be improved through completion of bike trails and incentives for bicycle commuting.
- More detailed traffic analysis, including data on non-peak hour vehicle trips, expected patient trips, and traffic impacts during the construction phase. This information is necessary to properly evaluate the impact of the Walter Reed relocation and mitigation measures. The proposed MD-355 Corridor Study should be extended north to Montrose Road and south to MD 410.
- Construction impacts on neighborhoods surrounding NNMC should be evaluated and best management practices implemented to reduce the effects of excessive noise, air pollution, and truck traffic.
- NNMC should appoint a Community Liaison Group to create dialogue and resolve issues with residents of surrounding communities during construction and through the relocation of Walter Reed.

Bethesda is a welcoming community and will provide our wounded soldiers, sailors, and Marines with the hero’s welcome they deserve. It is my hope that the Navy takes the opportunity to listen to residents as they share their voices for how to make this welcome possible.

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